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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the efforts to use contemporary ideas about narrative to rethink educational practice at the level of "root metaphor," (Stephen Pepper) and argue that "narrative schooling" might revitalize the actual processes of schooling. There is a concern that, especially at the secondary level, public schools are experience-averse in all essential qualities, in compulsory institutional status, in the way in which human and material resources are administered, in the manner in which classrooms are organized and managed and teaching is conducted, and in the entire elaborate system of student classification, assignment, and assessment. To correct these conditions, this paper proposes a theoretical formulation called reconstructive query, based on ideas drawn from John Dewey, the U.S. philosopher Justus Buchler, phenomenological thought, and the works of a number of other post-modernist thinkers. Reconstructive query is the theoretical latticework of an experiential alternative to mechanistic schooling. It sets forth the minimum conditions for a nonpsychologistic pedagogy whose purpose is to open up the world to the classroom and the classroom to the world. This process brings the learner's habits under stress, forcing adaptive revisions. The purpose of schooling in this conception is change and development, rather than the mastery of subjects as such. In such a system, the use of narrative connects theory and practice. The central organizing instrumentality for the program described is an emergent portfolio developed and maintained by the student in any available medium or media). Contains a 35-item bibliography. (DK)

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"LIKE LIFE ITSELF": NARRATIVE AND THE REVITALIZATION OF EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the John Dewey Society
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"Like Life Itself": Narrative and the Revitalization of Educational Practice

In the past couple of decades narrative has become a significant if not quite major theme in educational discourse. Narrative as storytelling has been in our midst all along, of course; "international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself," wrote the French philosopher Roland Barthes (cited in Tappan and Brown, 1991, p 174)). Narrative threads the continuity of our autonomous existence. It is an enactment as well as an idea, linking past with future, inside with outside, our selves with the social world, which explains its importance both in the commonsense world as well as in "professional" humanistic discourse.

The purpose of this (narrative) paper is to describe my efforts (Hopkins, 1994) to use some contemporary ideas about narrative to rethink educational practice at the level of "root metaphor," and to argue that something I call "narrative schooling" might revitalize the actual processes of schooling.

A couple of years ago I had reached an impasse in completing a book about experiential learning. I set out to write this book because it seemed to me that our schools are entangled in an increasingly mechanistic approach to instruction and administration that denies students access to their own experience as stimulus to learning. Schooling at the secondary level, especially, appeared to me to be experience-averse in all its essential qualities--in its compulsory institutional status, in the way in which human and material resources are administered, in the manner in which classrooms are organized and managed and teaching is conducted, in the entire elaborate system of student classification, assignment and assessment.

The result of this denial of voice is a subliminal, oppositionist struggle in the secondary schools between students and the system, a struggle that no one wins outright, but which saps everyone's strength, hollows out the legitimacy of the system, and contributes to a pervasive lack of trust among all the actors involved.

Moreover, this profoundly undemocratic system, in which learning subject matter is assumed to be an artifact of a highly-controlled environment, teaches apathy, incivility, and cynicism, while it humiliates and marginalizes many students, leading a high proportion of those who most need a leg up to withdraw entirely and fall back into a despairing world of aimlessness, political impotence, underemployment, economic and social vulnerability, and even criminal activity.

I was convinced that it was futile to attempt to reform this system. I didn't want it to be more efficient; I wanted it to be different. To make it more efficient would be to turn the schools into more standardized, more competitive, more regimented places, as the resurgent neo-conservatives who make up the "excellence movement" would have us do. The schools in their present form seemed to me like a house built on an eroding coastline; sooner or later a big storm will come along and . . .who knows?

This is not a new analysis, of course. At the heart of my concern, and what I hoped would make it useful, was my emphasis on the schools' principled suppression of the lived experience of students as a factor in their education, suppression carried out in the name of order and control and discipline, a condition that has become intensified during what Philip Wexler (1992) has called the "Reagan restoration."

My contribution to the correction of these conditions is a theoretical formulation I call reconstructive query, based on ideas drawn from John

Dewey, the American philosopher Justus Buchler, phenomenological thought, and the works of a number of other post-modernist thinkers, (as well as from my experience as a trainer of Peace Corps Volunteers in the sixties).

Reconstructive query is the theoretical latticework of an experiential alternative to mechanistic schooling. It sets forth the minimum conditions for a nonpsychologistic pedagogy whose purpose is to open up the world to the classroom and the classroom to the world. It depicts a "learner-in-the-world" as an actor in a dramatic conversation with what is given in the experienced world. The "script" is composed as the learner pursues "ends-in-view" that undergo constant revision. This process brings the learner's habits under stress, forcing adaptive revisions. The purpose of schooling in this conception is change and development, or what Dewey called growth, rather than the mastery of subjects as such. The reconstructive experience occurs as the learner-in-the-world negotiates the environment in an attitude of free responsibility.

My explication of reconstructive query includes extended discussion of several constructs drawn from the work of Justus Buchler--query, proception, method, and judgement--which combine to define experience-based learning as a kind of processive critical inquiry. "The striving to make stability of meaning prevail over the instability of events is the main task of human effort," Dewey (1971) wrote in Experience and Nature (p. 45). Reconstructive query accents the word striving in this definitive passage. An active, moving, open-ended term, it accounts for learning as a life process, not as the mastery of knowledge nuggets.

This is obviously abstract, theoretical stuff. In doing the book, what I lacked was a practical program for putting these principles into effect, because the more I thought about it, the more convinced I became that

alternative schooling in its traditional, free-school form, was not enough. So I turned off my word processor for a few weeks and did some reading. It didn't take me long to get to the subject of narrative. The gatekeeper was Jerome Bruner (1990), speaking through his luminous little book, Acts of Meaning, which is not about narrative as such but is another of Bruner's continuing efforts to "reformulate" psychological thought.

Psychology, he argues, has lost touch with culture, with the "selves" of its subjects. Experimentalism, behaviorism, pure empiricism--these are veins that have run out because they have substituted "information-processing" for "meaning-making" as their central concerns. He urges the field to take into account what he calls a "folk psychology, the culturally shaped notions in terms of which people organize their views of themselves, of others, and of the worlds in which they live" (p. 137). This folk (or cultural) psychology is based on a set of propositions that are not testable in the customary empirical ways; it is "an exercise in narrative and storytelling." It relies less upon the manipulations of experimental method than upon listening to people talk about their inner lives. It is supported by a "powerful structure of narrative culture--stories, myths, genres of literature" (p. 138).

Here, it seemed to me, was it, my operational principle--people talking about their lives, telling stories, creating story lines, making sense of things, narrative. And so I was off, using first Bruner's, then succeeding bibliographies as launching pads. There isn't space here to review this bibliographic journey in detail, except to report that it was one of the more interesting of my reading life, that it enabled me to finish a book, and that it isn't over yet.

Not all of the writing about narrative that I found useful--indeed, relatively little of it--had directly to do with education. W. J. T.

Mitchell's (1980) collection includes essays by an historian, a psychoanalyst, several philosophers, numbers of literary theoreticians, and a novelist. The philosophers Paul Ricouer (1988) and Alisdair MacIntyre (1984), both of whom have important things to say about narrative, write at a level of lofty abstraction that is dimensions away from something as worldly as education. Stephen Crites (1971) wrote his article, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," when he was chaplain at Wesleyan University but the article refers to education only tangentially. Three authors whose works are essential reading for any narrative project--Theodore Sarbin (1986), D.E. Polkinghorne (1988), and Anthony Paul Kerby (1991)—ignore the educational uses of narrative as such, although their ideas have, in my judgement, profound implications for the practice of schooling.

There is a substantial quantity of provocative educational research and theorizing based on narrative. Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly's continuing inquiry into classroom process illustrates how narrative may be used imaginatively and productively in thinking about education and educational practice. The "governing question" in their work is "How do teachers and students know their classrooms?" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1987). Moreover, advocates and practitioners of critical studies in education have used narrative fruitfully as an explanatory principle for examining various educational functions and processes at the level of theory (see, for example, Anderson and Page, in press).

But most of the practical uses of narrative in education are directed toward improving the present system--teaching children to write, to do numbers, to personalize history. That is, narrative (or autobiography) is used by teachers to improve instructional practice and to solve certain

technical problems having to do with motivating and keeping students interested in subject matter.

Numbers of authors before me, however, have seen narrative as I do, as a means to "create new conditions for knowledge," as Jo Anne Pagano (1991) puts it in an elegant essay in a collection on narrative edited by Carol Witherell and Nell Noddings (1991). She continues:

> Many of us have used students' autobiographical writings in a variety of situations and for a variety of purposes. When I began to use autobiographical writing in my senior seminar on curriculum and teaching in the humanities, it was for the purpose of encouraging students to bring curriculum theory to their lives and to theorize their lives in schools. Autobiography promised to be a passage between theory and practice and to make it possible for students to develop the habit of critical self-reflection. (p. 193).

That's it exactly; narrative is indeed a "passage between theory and practice," and if narrative can connect theory and practice in teacher education in the humanities, why can't it play a more expansive role, even serve as a root metaphor for all of schooling? And if this should occur, what difference would it make?

The term "root metaphor" is borrowed from the works of the American philosopher Stephen Pepper (by way of Theodore Sarbin's [1986] work on narrative psychology.) In two books written 25 years apart, Pepper (1942, 1967) developed a system of four philosophical clusters or catchments, "world hypotheses," each representing an overriding, internally-consistent

philosophical principle. Attached to each world hypothesis is an explanatory "root metaphor" that is intended to concretize, for commonsense purposes, the more abstract hypothesis as it orders and guides judgement in the sphere in which it operates.

One of his world hypotheses--the one that I see as dominating education--he called mechanism, which he associated with modern science. Its root metaphor is the machine. If schooling is conceived as a mechanistic process, then teachers are the major actors, sending messages down the conduit to the students, whose task is to receive, process, and integrate these messages and send them back up the conduit as test responses. Teaching becomes a matter of technique, of lesson plans and strategies, as students are manipulated toward ends that often don't find salience in their lives.

I consider this to be a flawed and ultimately unworkable approach to schooling, not only because real human beings are resistant to the constraints imposed to make this ideal model work, but also because the conditions of the modern world make it very difficult to control what enters the educational conduit. And it is undesirable as well, from any democratic and/or developmental perspective.

Another of Pepper's world hypotheses he called "contextualism," the root metaphor of which is narrative, associated with those pragmatic and post-modernist philosophies that see the world as indeterminate and unpredictable, as lacking in metaphysical certainty (see Rorty, 1989). Contextualism/narrative are, it seems to me, the world hypothesis and root metaphor most befitting our present complex and turbulent circumstances because a contextualist conception contains most (if not all) the elements of learning as appropriated experience. Those scholars and researchers who have taken storytelling seriously as an educational modality seem to agree that it

is a communal activity that constellates the self; that it delivers and constructs meaning; and that it is an activity that both requires and actuates freedom. If narrative is the root metaphor, students (as storytellers) are the main actors, and teachers and subject matter and the experienced world become resources to the creation and sustenance of the continuing story, which may take any one of several expressive forms.

I've concluded, however, that if narrative is to achieve these ends, we must go all the way with it and find a way to make it the controlling idea in education--the "root metaphor", the dominant world view behind the educational process, the new educational paradigm, if you will. Otherwise, it is merely another technique for softening and humanizing mechanism, a good thing that doesn't go far enough.

Now what would a school be like if it were operated according to "narratory" principles. My book dedicates three chapters to this subject, and I can only provide the sketchiest kind of summary of what I came up with.

The first thing I did was limit the formal narrative program to secondary schools, arguing in some detail that inattention to lived experience is characteristic more of the advanced grade levels than of the elementary schools. Then I conjured up a fantasy high school, called Huck Finn High (for a reason), in which narratory principles would dominate, and set out to describe its program.

That setting had to be characterized by freedom and trust, on the theory, as Richard Rorty (1989) wrote, that "If we take care of freedom, truth can take care of itself" (p. 176). Compulsory attendance, hall passes and monitors, and all other confinements or restraints not established by democratic means and that do not serve the purposes of the school's program are abolished. But the most important issue has to do with expression;

students in Huck Finn High must be free to express what is on their minds in a form (or forms) appropriate to the conceptions being expressed. Indeed, they are encouraged to do this, and things are set up to make it easy for them to do so. The process of Huck Finn High is organized around student talk and expression.

As it is today, students in the vast majority of our secondary schools have highly-circumscribed narrative rights at best and none at all at worst. This condition is a representation of what the anthropologist Dell Hymes, in an article co-written with Courtney Cazden (Cazden and Hymes, 1978), has referred to as our predisposition to "dichotomize forms and functions of language use," that is, arrange them along a heirarchy of acceptability.

One of the forms of language use we have dichotomized into near disuse in schools is student narrative. That is, students are free only to appear to listen or get out, not to talk freely about their lives. Student anecdote is pushed aside, ignored, and depreciated. This leads to a kind of "deadened dialectic," as the philosopher Richard Zaner put it, in which the situation makes demands on the student but the student is not authorized to make demands on the situation.

To depreciate narrative is to depreciate experience, to suggest that it is valueless. It is to strike at people at the level of their interior selves. Narrative, after all, is a deeply human, linguistic, process, a kind of primal developmental impulse--people talking about their lives, about the meaning of things that they experience, telling stories. As free people we do not just <u>tell</u> stories; we <u>live</u> them, create them, construct them, define ourselves through them.

Recovery of narrative is vital to the reconstruction of our system of schooling. Loss of narrative rights is a deep humiliation, a developmental

insult. When narrative is lost, so is the past and future. The death of narrative means the death of freedom. Winston Smith, the doomed hero in George Orwell's 1984, remarked that "Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four. If that is granted all else follows." But at a deeper level even than this, what Winston and the other residents of George Orwell's dystopia had lost was the freedom to construct an independent, individual story. And they had been denied this narratory freedom on purpose, as are the students in our high schools in 1994.

Narrative requires what I call freedom-within-structure, as in basketball, where the players operate within a structure but do wondrously imaginative and free things with their bodies while collaborating in pursuit of their goals. Nárrative requires freedom of expression and freedom to articulate, to act on one's forms of judgement. It requires free movement, embodiment, responsibility. It also requires structure and definition and a kind of emergent order--that is, order that emerges out of the narrative process itself but is not prior to it. So Huck Finn is a free movement high school because freedom and narrative are dialectically inseparable.

At Huck Finn high each student belongs to a nine- or ten-person heterogeneous small group, ungraded, autonomous, covering the entire age span of the school. Master teachers are responsible for training, supervising and assisting two or three of these groups. The teacher's emphasis is on the process and development of the group, because in time the groups are meant to be largely self-directing.

The group members tell their stories to the group--a reflective and constructive process. The group, with the teacher helping out as necessary, listens, supports, criticizes, and assists its members to search out and use

available resources in the school and the community to make sense of the evolving stories.

The central organizing instrumentality for the program is an emergent portfolio (emergent in that it is always in process, no more "finished" than the student's life) developed and maintained by the student in any available medium (or media). The narrative group advises, assists, is the immediate audience for, participates in evaluating, and generally monitors portfolio development, with the instructor helping out as needed. Written narrative is read by the group; spoken narrative is audited by the group; representational narrative (videos, works of art, poetry, photography) is presented to the group. Group members are obligated to pay attention to and help each other. Thus the narrative school not only respects "multiple intelligences" (Gardner, 1983, 1993); it provides, in the portfolio process, an instrumentality for the non-invidious expression of diversity of skill and perspective.

The subject matter curriculum of the school serves, and is shaped by, this process. The narrative school is organized around a metacurriculum drawing its energy from a narrative impulse that stimulates the reconstructive assimilation of materials to the ends and purposes of students. These materials are found in the world the students experience, in the practical environment of the community—in its institutions and processes--and in the course subjects and educational services that make up the supporting school program. Courses support portfolio development; they go on more or less all the time on an open-door basis, with adaptations in length and intensity that are required by the nature of the process. None is required. Teachers and their subject matter competence become the servants of this process.

This may appear to impose complex management problems, with students coming and going all the time and making singular demands on the subject matter and thus on instructors, disrupting the orderly flow of things. But this need not necessarily be so if school staff are able to give up their obsession with control and conventional order, and if teaching of all subjects is seen as having a narratory dimension or orientation. Subject matter comes to life when it is associated with the actual narrative structures of real people living (and planning) their lives. Knowledge may or may not accrue to a learner in relationship to sequential teaching; it all depends. It is at least possible that a learner's choice to take on a subject is more important than any teacher's manipulations; the learner chooses what to assimilate, not the teacher.

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This, in brief, is what I mean by narrative schooling, although obviously there are many possible variations on the basic idea. What I have set forth here is a utopian formulation. (I hasten to add that mechanistic schooling is also utopian--a great idea that doesn't work.) It would be exciting to see some school go all the way with narrative, but any modification of the pure model that takes students' experience seriously would make an enormous difference.

Is narrative schooling possible? Of course. Is it probable? Perhaps not, but at the very least, it seems to me, the idea of narrative schooling gives us the right things to talk about. In the remainder of this exercise, I'd like to discuss some of the reasons why I believe that it may offer possibilities for reform that other alternative schooling proposals have lacked.

The first is that narrative is a universal and natural phenomenon. It's something we do together all the time in families, organizations, and other consanguineous groups. Most of us were brought up on stories told at family gatherings, stories illustrated in picture albums and passed on by elders. I am influenced over a half-century later by the stories my grandfather told his family about his life as a young man on the frontier.

There is, in brief, something primitive and archaic about narrative; it goes on with or without our thinking about it. Stories are evolving; they can't be stopped. They are a product of living, both cause and effect, a processive matrix, germinal, generative, rudimentary, primal, and originative. We are shaped by mythic narrative structures, all of us, (just as we live <u>together</u> in those grand explanatory schemes called metanarratives). Stories are the connective tissue of our communal lives. I suppose it's possible to see them as pernicious, but my guess is that most of us understand, at some pre-reflective level, that our narratives are important to who we are. To say that school is where you learn to tell your story and shape your future is to catch onto something primal, elemental, fundamental.

A second attractive quality of narrative schooling is that it is offers a corrective not just to the experiential deficiencies of the mechanistic, conduit-model system but also to previous approaches to alternative, open, education. It constitutes a workable progressive vision of student-centered education that has never lost its rhetorical presence in our educational discourse. I say workable because narrative schooling attempts to strike a good balance between order and freedom. William Firestone's (1976) research into parent-operated free schools suggested that one of the vulnerabilities of progressive reform was its failure to provide a ready solution to the

freedom versus authority issue, a weakness noted earlier in Allen Graubard's (1971) study of alternative education in the sixties. Narrative schooling as it has been defined may be messy, it may create more dissonant action than the schools are accustomed to, but no one can call it soft; it generates its own order and structural regularity, and does not just set students free to wander about in search of fulfillment.

But narrative schooling, in its sanctioning of movement, embodiment, confict, dissonance and creative expression has the potential of making high schools much more interesting places for everyone (if that is what we want them to be.)

I believe that in narrative schooling the emphasis on telling one's story will lead ultimately to the disappearance of much of the passive-aggressive oppositionist behavior that characterizes American high schools, and that this will obviate the preoccupation with order and control that consumes so much time and energy there. The controlling assumption here is that the obsession with order in secondary education is itself a source of disorder, and that the emphasis on narrative could release and channel toward productive ends energies that have heretofore been expended on resistance or dissipated in boredom and cynicism. (For a full, and chilling, explication of this phenomenon, see Linda McNeil's (1983) astute discussion of the curricular consequences of what she calls, appropriately, "defensive teaching," in which high school social studies teachers dealing with controversial and complex material "simplify content and reduce demands on students in return for classroom order and minimal student compliance on assignments" [p. 114].)

There is little evidence that smoothness, predictability, forced attention--order as it is enforced in high schools--is conducive of learning. Indeed, learning may be much more associated with disorder, with change, with

friction and what Dewey called growth. "We cannot change habit directly: that notion is magic," Dewey (1922) wrote in Human Nature and Conduct. "But we can change it indirectly by modifying conditions, by an intelligent selecting and weighing of the objects which engage attention and which influence the fulfillment of desires (p. 20). . . We must work on the environment, not merely on the hearts of men" (p. 22). So in Huck Finn High we're not worried very much by haphazard, stochastic talk, or by conflict, diversity, and noise. We're much more concerned with eliminating the pinpricks of humiliation that are insidiously occurring in typical high schools and that deform the learning process through the suppression of speech, risk-taking and affiliation.

The most compelling source of internalized order in the narrative process is the portfolio. Portfolio work provides a constantly-evolving set of ends-in-view, as students seek ways of expressing the meanings of their lives: read literature to experience imaginative approaches to the construction of plots and themes; study history to provide perspective to their position in a temporal/spatial continuity that is influenced by human choice and chance; examine economics from the perspective of the self as an actor in an economic drama involving the production, consumption, and exchange of commodities and services; investigate scientific subjects as means of comprehending oneself as an organism functioning, growing, and developing in an environment of matter, energy, and life processes; look into the social sciences in search of understanding of ethnicity, race, or conditions of life as a social-political entity; exploit the library for all these purposes; and use a reading or writing or mathematics lab, or an art of media studio, to assist in portfolio construction.

All of this suggests that one of the more powerful attractions of narrative schooling may be its potential to regenerate the subject matter of the secondary schools. No claim is made that narrative schooling in itself makes kids smarter. It does not deliver subject matter; it delivers meaning and thus motivation. If subject matter does not connect with our lives, it asks, why should any of us learn it? It stimulates "interest and effort" because it enables individual students to turn their expressed ends-in-view into learning projects. It converts subject matter into knowledge by making it continuous with the experienced world. Narrative schooling places subject matter where it belongs--at the service of the student's interests and development.

A decade ago Seymour Sarason (1983) took up one of John Dewey's most consistent themes in proposing that students be exposed to subject matter "[in] ways that start with [their] interests and seek to place them in sites in which they can experience the multifaceted significance of subject matter, ways that take seriously the obvious fact that subject matter has derived from, has influenced, and continues to influence the world" (p. 139). Narrative schooling has great potential to achieve just this end result.

Much of the prospective power of narrative to transform education lies in its unique relationship to the development of the self in individual persons and of cultural integrity in groups. Witherell and Noddings (1991) call attention to "a growing body of literature in philosophy and psychology [that] has acknowledged that narrative structure is at the core of the formation of the self" (p. 8), a theme propounded by writers represented in this collection as well as by authors as diverse as Bruner (1985, 1990), Richard Zaner (1981), Polkinghorne (1988), Sarbin (1986), Kerby (1991), Ernest Keen (1986) and others who have published major or minor works on the subject in recent years.

Narrative is crudely synonomous with autobiography, with the organization, articulation, and expression of experience, and with self-development. Our "selves," the argument goes, are products of a narrative impulse that plays itself out both in the living through and the recounting of our personal stories and the dialectical enfolding of these stories into the culturally-based metanarratives that are both cause and effect of the action they subsume.

High schools are not "safe" places in which to develop an integrated self, and the dangers are not just in concealed weaponry. As they reject the experienced lives of students, they become emotionally unsafe. In his extended critical ethnographic study of three socially-disparate urban high schools, Philip Wexler (1992) found a "socially conditioned mutual withdrawal of emotion and identification by students and teachers" (p. 111), a systematic process of "emptying" which has a devastating effect on identity formation in students and which contributes inevitably to compensatory oppositionist activity. If you want to "become somebody" in any positive sense, Wexler found, you receive mostly negative assistance in American high schools. If you're lucky, you can do this in your family or community; if you're not, then you have to do the best you can on the streets.

Moreover, the narrative process delivers up meaning, and puzzlement about the meaning of subject matter must be one of the reasons that our secondary schools are floundering. ("What does this stuff have to do with me?") Narrative acts, writes Jerome Bruner, are "acts of meaning." Donald E. Polkinghorne (1988) in his ground-breaking book, Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences, writes that narrative emplotment is something people do to form and construct meaning and a self as the literal personification of meaning. He writes:

> Narrative involves the gathering together of events into a plot in which signification is given to the events as they relate to the theme of the story. The plot configures the events into a whole, and the events are transformed from merely serial, independent happenings into meaningful happenings that contribute to the whole theme. As the meaning and function of an individual word becomes clear when the sentence of which it is a part is understood, so the significance of an individual event becomes apparent when one knows the plot of which it is a part. (p. 143)

So narrative can and often does construct meaning out of experience and in this process it contributes to the development of an intact self. It is this relationship to the experienced life that explains the potential power of narrative as an educational device, for narrative contextualizes experience in a "natural" sense-making process.

Take the idea of community, for example. If we want our schools to enhance community, they must be operated according to communitarian principles, and become places where, as Dewey (1933) put it, "the primary source of social control resides in the very nature of the work being done as a social enterprise [and] in which all individuals have an opportunity to contribute and to which all feel a responsibility" (p. 56). In the very structure of the narrative process people must actually listen to each other, share each other's stories, and come to terms with diversity.

A powerful characteristic of the Huck Finn model is its reliance on heterogeneous small groups as learning communities. But I think that it would be a mistake to think of these groups as sanctioned solipsisms. Each individual narrative unfolds into a larger, more inclusive, social narrative. "People awaken to consciousness in a society," Stephen Crites (1971) wrote in a seminal essay on the subject, "with the inner story of experience and its enveloping musicality already infused with cultural forms . . .the <u>way</u> we remember, anticipate, and even directly perceive, is largely social" (p. 304).

Schools as we have allowed them to evolve are not sites for the living through of expansive personal stories of the sort that lead to self-development or community. The stories schools influence under present conditions are to many students trivial and irrelevant because they don't articulate with the experienced world. As Dewey remarked in "The Child and the Curriculum," (1990) schools too often reflect a "cabin and cramped experience" that results when "the mind, shut out from worthy employ and missing the taste of adequate performance, comes down to the level of that which is left to it to know and do" (pp. 355-56).

This leads to what is to me the most promising practical potential of narrative schooling--that it could offer a means to reverse our devastating failures in the education of racially and economically marginalized youngsters, through offering them a way to master mainstream skills and knowledge that at the same time respects the integrity of their ethnic and cultural roots. Minority youngsters will not make "mainstream" choices unless it makes sense to them to do so, unless such choices somehow conform to an image of their narrative future. And they will not make these choices if it requires that they suffer the humiliation of rejecting the meaning of their

lives to do so. They must be allowed--even encouraged--to speak in their own voices in an institutionally-sanctioned setting--a setting that is precisely what the narrative portfolio groups is intended to provide.

It seems to me that narrative schooling is not one of those liberal, open-classroom, strategies that Lisa Delpit (1986) and others have criticized because they fail to respond to the true needs of minority students. "Open" instructional designs, she suggests, may be fine for mainstream youngsters, but disadvantaged minority children need a different kind of nurturance involving discipline and structure and firm guidance in learning those basic skills that alone will enable them to use their native gifts in pursuit of success in the world.

Again--narrative schooling does not itself teach subject matter or skills; it frames and gives meaning to what happens in the school. It solicits the individual voices of all students, and it allows each student to choose what is important and therefore where to invest energy and gifts. It opens all learning possibilities to appropriation. It does not preclude the direct, didactic teaching of skills. What it offers is structured choice. Without such choice and investment, nothing much is learned by any student, regardless of background or social and economic status.

All this may be beside the point, of course. The American people may not want the schools to achieve the "liberal" objectives that narrative might well make possible. This is a time when politicians scurry for their holes like prairie dogs in a tornado when the word liberalism is mentioned, and when school boards must cope with a lot of fringe-group craziness in the environment. The political scientist Benjamin Barber (1993) in his recent Harper's article, expressed doubt that the American people are much interested in democracy (and by extension, democratic education) any more.

"The logic of democracy," he writes, "begins with public education, proceeds to informed citizenship, and comes to fruition in the securing of rights and liberties. We have been nominally democratic for so long that we presume it is our natural condition rather than the product of persistent effort and tenacious responsibility." He argues that our public schools could be sites where "young, selfish individuals turn into conscientious, community-minded, citizens" (p. 44). But he has severe doubts that this will happen anytime soon, if at all.

At least some of the negatives associated with narrative schooling are obvious (and there may be others that are not so obvious). For example, disciples of inertia can suggest with some accuracy, I suppose, that if we encourage teen-age youngsters to talk about their lives in a school setting, we're going to hear a lot of unsettling things about subjects that have been considered private or otherwise inappropriate for discussion in schools--domestic relations, religion, sex, violence, addiction, social class, race, morality and ethics, politics itself. It is also predictable that if we propose to bring the stuff of individual lives into the schools, all the enemies of openness will doubtless make themselves heard. And they're quite right to do so from their perspective, for openness is the enemy of the dogmatism with which they order their lives. Openness sanctions conflict, and conflict leads to heaven knows what.

I personally would be willing to support an anything-goes policy toward revelation in Huck Finn High. I think it's worth the risk, for it is at least conceivable that narrative, as an educative process, could offer an approach to a kind of grand compromise in our society over many of the deeply divisive so-called "life-style" issues that plague our politics and threaten the civility that makes community possible. The grand compromise would have as its postulate, "You listen to my story and I'll listen to yours."

In my book I argue the proposition that the schools "have been overwhelmed by the intensity, the acessibility, the sheer power of the environment in which they are situated, . . because their structural ambivalence toward learners' experience bars the effective contextualization of subject matter and forbids the utilization of the problematics of students' lives to bring meaning to subject matter, or of subject matter to bring meaning to students' lives" (p. 27).

High school students know where the action is. They know what counts. The messages kids pick up from the world outside school are pervasive and powerful. Have you seen any daytime television recently, or been to the movies, or glanced at (or even read) the magazines at a grocery checkout counter, or watched CNN? The genie is already out of the bottle, and we might as well confront the reality of the genie's influence. As Benjamin Barber (1993) wrote late last year, "The very first lesson smart kids learn is that it is much more important to heed what society teaches implicitly by its deeds and reward structures than what school teaches explicitly in its lesson plans and civic sermons" (p. 42). Any society that can tolerate--even offer riches and celebrity—to the likes of Oprah and Geraldo and Rush Limbaugh and Howard Stern can surely come to tolerate the stresses of interpersonal openness among high school students.

Undeniably, what I propose here is a massive exercise in risk-taking, an undertaking almost as scarifying as continuing on our present course. But as our mentor John Dewey (1960) wrote in his book about the dilemmas (and the indivisibility) of theory and practice, The Quest for Certainty:

> The pathos of unfulfilled expectations, the tragedy of defeated purpose and ideals, the catastrophes of accident, are the commonplaces of all comment on the human scene. We survey conditions, make the wisest

> choice we can; we act, and must trust the rest to fate, fortune, or providence. Moralists tell us to look to the end when we act and then inform us that the end is always uncertain. Judging, planning, choice, no matter how thoroughly conducted, and action no matter how prudently executed, never are the sole determinants of any outcome. Alien and indifferent natural forces, unforeseeable conditions enter in and have a decisive voice. The more important the issue, the greater is their say as to the ulterior event. (p. 7)

Clearly, if we are to have anything like narrative schooling, it will be as a manifestation of the "big bang" theory of institutional change and not of incrementalism. This does happen, of course,; masses of people do change their minds all at once, as happened in eastern Europe. For minds to change, however, they must be engaged.

One of the more compelling things about narrative is that it is more than just an idea; it is a fact. It's there, in the underground of the schools, already, "like life itself." All we have to do is set it loose. If we are to align the schools with students' lives we will have to overcome our deep aversion as a people to openness, diversity, and conflict, and rediscover the arts of tolerance, empathy, consensus and compromise. It won't be easy. We may be forced to conclude in time that the only thing worse than opening up to our real differences and diversity, and of letting freedom reign, are the consequences of not doing so.

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